

SUBJECT: Pakistan: Policy Toward Afghanistan in the Post-Martial Law Period

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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in the Post-Martial Law Period

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Summary

Pakistan's moves toward civilian politics--exemplified by the lifting of martial law on 30 December--probably will not result in early changes in its policy on Afghanistan. A number of potential developments, however--including increased problems along the Afghan border, a disappointing US aid package, an economic downturn, or a serious Soviet bid to undertake negotiations leading to Soviet troops withdrawals--would make it more difficult for Islamabad to sustain public and cabinet support. President Zia and Foreign Minister Yaqub Khan, who are committed to supporting the Afghan resistance, almost certainly will continue to be the principal architects of foreign policy, while Prime Minister Junejo and the National Assembly will probably focus more on domestic policy. Although the extraparliamentary political opposition will continue to criticize US-Pakistani ties--and by

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extension Islamabad's policy towards Afghanistan--it is unlikely to have enough clout to challenge seriously Pakistan's current policy supporting the resistance. [redacted]

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Civilianization probably will change the style, if not the substance, of Pakistan's foreign policy-making. President Zia retains a firm grip on external affairs and, according to the US Embassy in Islamabad, his commitment to the Afghan resistance is unshaken. Nevertheless, Zia will be careful to portray Prime Minister Junejo as Pakistan's chief executive officer and probably shares his conviction that Islamabad must assert its independence in foreign affairs. Zia and the civilian cabinet will stress that Pakistan is the final arbiter of its policy on Afghanistan. [redacted]

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We believe Prime Minister Junejo will concentrate on building a government party and power base. In doing so, he is likely to give at least the appearance of distancing himself--and Pakistan--from the United States. His main political vehicle, the Pakistan Muslim League long has had as goals the achievement of economic independence and nonalignment in foreign policy. Junejo's footdragging on going public with the formation of Pakistan Welfare International, the organization designed to channel humanitarian aid into Afghanistan reflects his desire that Pakistan's support for the Afghan resistance remain low-key. [redacted]

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Although the civilianization process has reduced the prominence of at least one outspoken and influential critic of the policy towards Afghanistan--former North-West Frontier Province Governor Lt. Gen. Fazle Haq--the government almost certainly will have to contend with other politicians and military leaders who object to the policy. In discussions between US and Pakistani officials since the end of martial law, both civilian and military officials have been quite willing to voice opinions at odds with the "party line." We believe that consensus building will quickly become a part of the political process--a development that will both slow the decision-making process and, on occasion, send mixed signals on foreign policy to Washington. [redacted]

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The Military--Mixed Views

The military generally supports the government's policy on Afghanistan, believing that it serves Pakistan's national interest. They see it strengthening Islamic solidarity both in Pakistan and with other Muslim nations. The military also believes the Soviet

threat to Pakistan is reduced as long as Moscow is tied down in Afghanistan. [redacted]

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A Weak Opposition

Zia's main civilian opposition coalition, the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), lost one of its principle rallying points when martial law was lifted. The MRD will continue to harp about the US-Pakistani relationship, however. It will draw on widespread popular suspicions about Washington's steadfastness as an ally to argue that Islamabad's Afghan policy exposes Pakistan to Soviet retribution. The more extreme among the opposition such as former Prime Minister Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) will charge that the United States is using Pakistan as a pawn for a confrontation with Moscow. Some also will argue--the current warming trend in Indo-Pakistani relations notwithstanding--that the real threat to Pakistan's security is India and that involvement in Afghanistan weakens Pakistan's ability to defend itself along its eastern border. [redacted]

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The opposition, in our view, has its work cut out if it is to mobilize public opinion against Islamabad's Afghanistan policy. A recent poll by Gallup-Pakistan in December indicated that most Pakistanis--even supporters of parties that call for direct talks with the Babrak regime--endorse current policy toward Afghanistan. Two-thirds of the respondents opposed direct talks even though many are troubled about the presence of at least 2.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. [redacted]

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Potential Troublespots

We believe that any of the following developments would make Afghan policy an exploitable issue for the opposition and erode support for Zia's Afghan policy in the Cabinet and among the military:

- A sharp rise in Soviet military pressure--such as cross-border raids and deeper air attacks inside Pakistan--would stimulate parliamentary demands that the regime defend its handling of the Afghan situation.
- Serious Soviet overtures about possible troop withdrawals would encourage those Pakistanis who object to or are ambivalent about the Afghanistan problem to push for a reassessment by Islamabad.
- An aid package from Washington deemed by the Pakistanis to be inadequate would be viewed by many in the National Assembly and among the public as another indication of Washington's unreliability as an ally and the folly of current policy towards Afghanistan. Still, recent conversations with US officials indicate that Pakistani officials are beginning to accept that US budgetary constraints will mean a post-1987 assistance program that falls well below Islamabad's request.
- Economic hardship almost certainly would result in an outcry against the burden of the Afghan refugees, heighten economic competition between the refugees and local Pakistanis, and escalate social violence in the areas where refugee camps are concentrated.

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